

Thank you for inviting me to speak to you on this lovely day. Since the Senior Farmers' Market Nutrition Program started in Northwest Ohio, its popularity has been overwhelming. Last year, 114 farmers participated and 16, 856 seniors from 10 counties were served. In addition, 5, 258 eligible seniors were turned away from the program. Unfortunately, while popularity and need continue to increase, funding is decreasing. We received a 10% cut in funding this year. In order to serve as many seniors as possible, the amount of money available to each senior will be decreased. While this will allow us to serve more individuals, it is not the perfect solution.

The SFMNP works! 95% of the coupons distributed last year were redeemed at local farm markets. Seniors use every "cent" of their coupons to purchase nutritious, fresh fruits and vegetables. They appreciate having more "income" for food. Not only does the program improve the nutritional status of seniors, it also supports local farmers. Several farmers have reported that without this program their family business would have gone bankrupt. In addition to the income generated from the SFMNP, family members accompanying seniors often purchase produce, as well.

The recent release of the *Dietary Guidelines for Americans*, calls for an increase in the consumption of fruits and vegetables. The SFMNP has actually increased the amount of fruits and vegetables seniors consume. How do we expect at-risk, seniors with limited incomes to meet the new standards for fruit and vegetable consumption, if we do not provide them with the economic means to do so?

Lately, a great deal of emphasis has been placed on prescription coverage for seniors. We should also place emphasis on nutrition programs, like the SFMNP, which greatly impact the health of seniors. In many cases, inexpensive diet modifications may eliminate the need for an expensive prescription medication. Fruits and vegetables are packed with vitamins, minerals, phytochemicals and fiber that are beneficial in preventing cardiovascular disease, diabetes, and cancer. Spending more money on prevention will decrease the amount of money spent on treatment.

A recent article in the Chicago Tribune, highlighted discrepancy's between USDA's subsidies and their food pyramid. A large portion of the USDA subsidies go to corn and soybean crops, which primarily are used to feed livestock. The food pyramid suggests that individuals eat meat in

moderation. Fish and beans are actually encouraged. On the other hand, fruit and vegetable farmers receive no subsidies from the USDA. However, the USDA guidelines state that fruits and vegetables should be encouraged, and the pyramid reflects they should make up a much larger portion of our diet than meat.

In summary, my recommended solutions are:

1. Increase rather than decrease funding.
2. Expand the SFMNP to include a fall and winter produce package.
Let's make a greater impact on the nutritional status of seniors!
3. Increase the amount of funding provided to the SFMNP to meet the demand. Also, expand to other areas throughout the country, without decreasing the funding to current areas.
4. Align USDA subsidies to reflect dietary guidelines.

The SFMNP is a win-win situation. It's an effective way to improve the nutritional status of seniors and support local, sustainable agriculture. Please help us keep a good thing growing.